

Guideline

Nature Conservation Act 1992

Selection of Release Sites for Rehabilitated Koalas in SEQ

This non-statutory guideline has been developed to support koala rehabilitators, the SEQ Wildlife Hospital Network, local governments, and the Department of Environment and Science in their respective roles in selecting suitable release sites for rehabilitated koalas in South East Queensland. This Guideline should be read in conjunction with relevant legislation, the Code of Practice: Rehabilitation of Sick, Injured, or Orphaned Koalas in Queensland, Communications Guideline: South East Queensland Koala Rehabilitation Network, and Guideline: the Ethical Euthanasia of Koalas in Queensland.

1 Purpose	2
2 Objectives of koala rehabilitation	2
3 Mandatory requirements and limitations for release of rehabilitated koalas	3
3.1 Legislative requirements	3
3.2 Code of Practice requirements	3
3.3 Permit requirements	4
4 Assessing all potential release sites	4
5 Assessment process	5
5.1 Rehabilitated koalas (excluding orphaned koalas (see 5.2 of this guideline), and infertile koalas (see 5.3 of this guideline))	5
5.2 Orphaned koalas	6
5.3 Infertile koalas	7
6 Release Sites Map	8
6.1 Release Sites Map amendment process and decisions	8
7 Definitions	9



Selection of Release Sites for Rehabilitated Koalas in South East Queensland

1 Purpose

A dedicated network of volunteer wildlife rehabilitators and wildlife hospitals provide rescue, care, and release services for sick, injured, and orphaned koalas in South East Queensland (SEQ). Through these actions, thousands of koalas that would otherwise not have survived have been successfully rescued, treated, cared for, and returned to the wild.

While a sick, injured, or orphaned koala is in treatment and care, due consideration must be given to the site the koala will be eventually released back into the wild. On occasion, identifying a suitable release site can be complex, for example, there may be limitations on suitable habitat in urbanised or cleared areas, changes in habitat condition while the koala is in care, unsuitable koala population dynamics, or the presence of significant threats to koala health and safety.

This guideline has been developed to support koala rehabilitators, SEQ Wildlife Hospitals, local governments, and the Department of Environment and Science (department) in their respective roles by:

1. Outlining legislative requirements that apply to the release of rehabilitated koalas (Section 3).
2. Providing guidance on how all potential release sites should be assessed, using the [Release Sites Assessment Form](#) (Section 4).
3. Providing flowcharts which outline the assessment process for the release of rehabilitated adult koalas, orphaned koalas, and infertile koalas (Section 5).
4. Establishing governance arrangements for a [Release Sites Map](#) (Section 6).

2 Objectives of koala rehabilitation

The overarching objectives for koala rehabilitation are to:

- a. contribute to the conservation of koalas by promptly returning suitably rehabilitated koalas to their rescue site or a suitable release site as close as practicable to their rescue site;
- b. ensure appropriate welfare outcomes for sick, injured, or orphaned koalas by providing appropriate husbandry, care, pain relief, and veterinary treatment when required, including timely euthanasia in cases with a poor prognosis;
- c. ensure human health and safety; and
- d. ensure a collaborative approach with First Nations peoples where possible, including fostering ongoing working relationships, consultation, and obtaining permissions from Traditional Owners and Elders where relevant.

Additional outcomes of the rehabilitation of sick, injured, or orphaned koalas may include:

- a. contribution to the body of knowledge on the ecology, conservation, management, veterinary care, husbandry, and behaviour of koalas; and
- b. contribution to the education of the general public, business and industry professions on issues related to the conservation and welfare of koalas.

Selection of Release Sites for Rehabilitated Koalas in South East Queensland

3 Mandatory requirements and limitations for release of rehabilitated koalas

Under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, *Nature Conservation (Animals) Regulation 2020*, and *Nature Conservation (Koala) Conservation Plan 2017* (authorising legislation), the department may issue a rehabilitation permit to a person or voluntary wildlife rehabilitation organisation, which authorises the holder or relevant person for the holder to rehabilitate koalas that are sick, injured, or orphaned.

The holder of a rehabilitation permit or relevant person for the holder must comply with the legislative requirements, the requirements under the *Code of Practice - Rehabilitation of Sick, Injured, or Orphaned Koalas in Queensland* (the *Code of Practice*), as well as any conditions imposed by the permit.

Unless there is a compelling reason to not follow the guidelines, the holder of a rehabilitation permit or relevant person for the rehabilitation permit holder should also comply with the guidelines.

3.1 Legislative requirements

The *Nature Conservation (Koala) Conservation Plan 2017* requires that the holder of the rehabilitation permit, or a relevant person for the holder, must release the koala into prescribed natural habitat for the koala that —

- a. is as close as practicable to the place where the koala was taken; and
- b. is suitable for maximising the koala's chance of long-term survival in the wild; and
- c. is suitable for minimising negative impacts on any existing koala population in the habitat.

Prescribed natural habitat is defined as:

- a. for a koala taken from the wild:
 - i. if, when the koala was taken, the koala was or would have been dependent on its mother—koala habitat within a maximum distance of 20 kilometres from where the koala was taken; or
 - ii. otherwise—koala habitat within a maximum distance of 10 kilometres from where the koala was taken.

3.2 Code of Practice requirements

The *Code of Practice - Rehabilitation of Sick, Injured, or Orphaned Koalas in Queensland* outlines the mandatory requirements for the release of koalas, including (but not limited to):

- a. Koala releasers must be suitably trained, for example, in accordance with the training standards outlined in section 19 of the *Code of Practice*.
- b. Koala releasers must only release koalas that have been assessed by a veterinarian and determined by the treating veterinarian to be physically and behaviourally fit for release. Koala releasers must release a koala as soon as practicable after this assessment. In SEQ, the treating veterinarian must be a veterinarian from the SEQ Wildlife Hospital Network.
- c. The release site must also be suitable for the koala's release. A suitable release site is one that;
 - i. contains appropriate habitat, shelter, water and food resources;
 - ii. is free of immediate hazards or risks (i.e., not a roadside);
 - iii. is known **not** to be subject to imminent land-clearing or significant development; and
 - iv. meets all other requirements in section 15 of the *Code of Practice*.
- d. If the rescue site is suitable for the koala's release, then the koala must be released there.
- e. If the rescue site is **not** suitable for release, koala releasers must ensure that the koala is released at a suitable release site as close as practicable to the rescue site.

Selection of Release Sites for Rehabilitated Koalas in South East Queensland

- f. Unless otherwise approved by the department, an infertile koala may **only** be released at the rescue site. Infertile koalas must **not** be released at any site that the treating veterinarian or koala releaser reasonably suspects to be at, or close to, carrying capacity for koalas, or at any site they reasonably suspect to have a high proportion of infertile koalas compared to fertile koalas.
- g. In circumstances where a koala is proposed to be released at a location other than its rescue site, a releaser must make reasonable efforts to ensure that the koala is not being moved from or into different Traditional Owner's Country without first consulting with the relevant Traditional Owners.
- h. Koala releasers must conduct an on-site confirmation of any proposed release site prior to releasing the koala to ensure it is a suitable release site.
- i. Where a rehabilitated koala is proposed to be released on private property, approval must be obtained from the private owner prior to the release.
- j. Where a rehabilitated koala is proposed to be released on Council owned or controlled land, approval must be obtained from the Council prior to the release. In circumstances where Council land is subject to lease, approval must also be obtained from the lease holder.
- k. Koalas must **not** be released into a protected area (e.g., a national park) or State forest unless all other release site options have been exhausted, and approval has been obtained from the department. For example, approval from the Ranger in Charge of a national park.
- l. If no suitable release site can be identified for a koala through the above processes, the department may advise of a suitable release site.
- m. If the rescue site of a koala is unknown, it must **not** be released without approval from the department.

3.3 Permit requirements

As per the specific conditions on the relevant permit.

4 Assessing all potential release sites

In assessing potential release sites, the rescue site **must** always be assessed first, and only in circumstances where the rescue site is determined to be unsuitable, nearby potential alternative sites should be assessed. Assessments should be made via a desktop assessment, utilising the [Release Sites Assessment Form](#) in conjunction with the [Release Sites Map](#). An on-site confirmation of any proposed release site **must** be conducted prior to the release of a koala.

Section 5 of this guideline outlines the assessment process, which differs depending on whether the koala is infertile, or is rescued as an orphan. The [Release Sites Assessment Form](#) provides additional detail relevant to the key factors that should be considered in each assessment process.

Selection of Release Sites for Rehabilitated Koalas in South East Queensland

5 Assessment process

5.1 Rehabilitated koalas (excluding orphaned koalas (see 5.2 of this guideline), and infertile koalas (see 5.3 of this guideline))

Step 1: The first site assessed **must** be the rescue site, review Map 1 of the [Release Sites Map](#).

Only if the rescue site is found to be unsuitable continue to the next step.

Step 2: Review Map 2 of the Release Sites Map, and if any mapped areas exist within 5 kilometres of the rescue site, assess these areas.

If there are no mapped areas, or if all mapped areas are assessed and found to be unsuitable continue to the next step.

Step 3: Review Map 2 of the Release Sites Map, and if any mapped areas exist within 10 kilometres of the rescue site, assess these areas.

If there are no mapped areas, or if all mapped areas are assessed and found to be unsuitable continue to the next step.

Step 4: Return to Map 1 of the Release Sites Map and assess any other areas within 10 kilometres of the rescue site.

Only if all potential areas within 10km are assessed and found to be unsuitable continue to the next step.

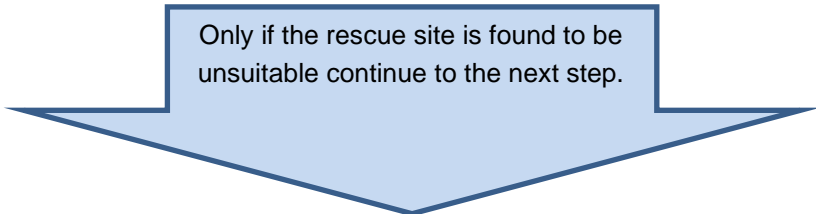
Step 5: In circumstances where no suitable release site can be identified through the above process, the department may advise of a suitable release site.

N.B. It is recommended that all successful assessments be saved for your own records.

Selection of Release Sites for Rehabilitated Koalas in South East Queensland

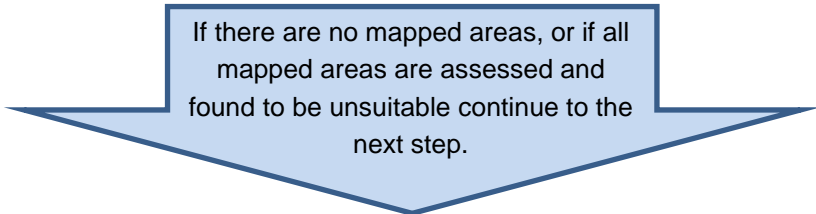
5.2 Orphaned koalas

Step 1: The first site assessed **must** be the rescue site, review Map 1 of the [Release Sites Map](#).



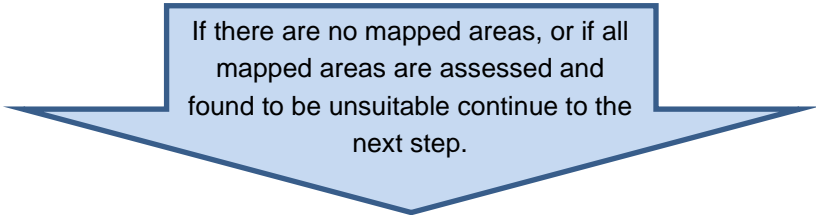
Only if the rescue site is found to be unsuitable continue to the next step.

Step 2: Review Map 2 of the Release Sites Map, and if any mapped areas exist within 10 kilometres of the rescue site, assess these areas.



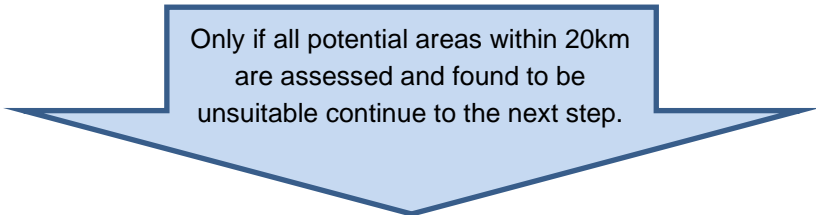
If there are no mapped areas, or if all mapped areas are assessed and found to be unsuitable continue to the next step.

Step 3: Review Map 2 of the Release Sites Map, and if any mapped areas exist within 20 kilometres of the rescue site, assess these areas.



If there are no mapped areas, or if all mapped areas are assessed and found to be unsuitable continue to the next step.

Step 4: Return to Map 1 of the Release Sites Map and assess any other areas within 20 kilometres of the rescue site.



Only if all potential areas within 20km are assessed and found to be unsuitable continue to the next step.

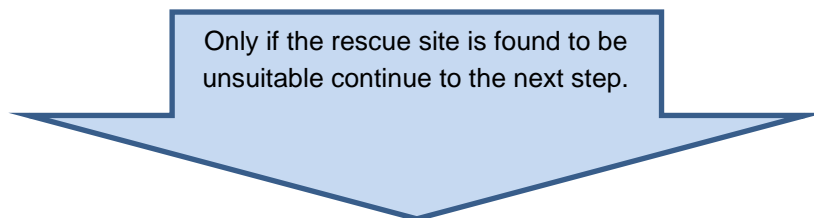
Step 5: In circumstances where no suitable release site can be identified through the above process, the department may advise of a suitable release site.

N.B. It is recommended that all successful assessments be saved for your own records.

Selection of Release Sites for Rehabilitated Koalas in South East Queensland

5.3 Infertile koalas

Step 1: The first site assessed **must** be the rescue site, review Map 1 of the [Release Sites Map](#).



Step 2: Alternative release sites must **only** be considered if the department has provided approval for the koala's release at an alternative release site.

N.B. It is recommended that all successful assessments be saved for your own records

Selection of Release Sites for Rehabilitated Koalas in South East Queensland

6 Release Sites Map

In circumstances where the rescue site is determined to be unsuitable for release, the [Release Sites Map](#) is a key instrument in identifying potential alternative release sites for fertile koalas.

Map 2 of the Release Sites Map is intended to guide releases of fertile koalas into relatively large patches of Koala Habitat Area (≥ 20 ha) or smaller interconnected patches of Koala Habitat Area inside Koala Priority Areas (KPAs) (≥ 2 ha). This is intended to maximise the likelihood of released fertile koalas becoming part of viable breeding populations, in areas subject to the strongest protections from habitat clearing or impacts.

The Release Sites Map is anticipated to be a sound identifier of suitable release sites now and into the future, due to a proposed cooperative approach to knowledge sharing to drive ongoing mapping amendments. All key parties are encouraged to continue to work together to gather and assess information and advice regarding the ongoing suitability of areas and provide this information to local government and the department for inclusion (where appropriate) on the Release Sites Map. The Communications Guideline: South East Queensland Koala Rehabilitation Network outlines the responsibilities of the key parties in this process.

In developing Map 2 of the Release Sites Map, the following business rules were applied as a starting point:

1. Include patches of koala habitat areas within KPAs that are ≥ 2 ha.
2. Exclude patches of koala habitat areas within KPAs that are < 2 ha.
3. Include patches of koala habitat areas outside KPAs that are ≥ 20 ha.
4. Exclude patches of koala habitat areas outside KPAs that are < 20 ha.
5. Exclude areas that are not koala habitat areas.

6.1 Release Sites Map amendment process and decisions

To reflect changes in the suitability of areas on the [Release Sites Map](#), local governments and the department will review the mapping, as required, annually at a minimum. All relevant parties will be notified, via the Queensland Koala Rehabilitation Hub, whenever refinements are made. The amendment process may involve including and excluding areas based on:

- a. new and updated Queensland Government spatial data;
- b. information provided by local governments relating to development applications; and
- c. information provided by koala rehabilitators, the SEQ Wildlife Hospital Network, local governments, and the department relating to on-ground conditions, such as;
 - i. habitat quality and maturity;
 - ii. habitat restoration; and
 - iii. the presence of significant threats and the apparent effectiveness of threat management measures.

Decisions on updates to the Release Sites Map should be agreed between the relevant local government and the department wherever possible. Where agreement cannot be reached, the department will be responsible for decisions on amendments to the Release Sites Map.

Selection of Release Sites for Rehabilitated Koalas in South East Queensland

7 Definitions

Animal — any member of the animal kingdom (other than humans) as defined in the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

Carrying capacity — the maximum number of koalas that a site can sufficiently sustain before it suffers significant deterioration.

Code of Practice — the *Code of Practice: Rehabilitation of Sick, Injured, or Orphaned Koalas in Queensland*.

Department — the Department of Environment and Science.

Guideline — the *Guideline: Selection of Release Sites for Rehabilitated Koalas in South East Queensland*.

Koala — a mammal of the species *Phascolarctos cinereus*.

Koala habitat —

- (a) an area of vegetation in which koalas live and that includes a koala habitat tree; or
- (b) an area of vegetation that consists primarily of koala habitat trees and which is reasonably suitable for sustaining koalas; or
- (c) a partially or completely cleared area used by koalas to cross from an area mentioned in paragraph (a) or (b) to another area mentioned in paragraph (a) or (b).

Koala habitat area — an area of vegetation that has been determined to contain koala habitat that is essential for the conservation of a viable koala population in the wild based on the combination of habitat suitability and biophysical variables, the purpose of which is to ensure impacts to koala habitat that is essential for the conservation of koalas in the wild will be avoided to ensure the long-term persistence of koala populations in the wild.

Koala habitat tree —

- (a) a tree of the *Corymbia*, *Melaleuca*, *Lophostemon* or *Eucalyptus* genera that is edible by koalas; or
- (b) a tree of a type typically used by koalas for shelter, including, for example, a tree of the *Angophora* genus.

Koala priority area — a large, connected area that has been determined to have the highest likelihood of achieving conservation outcomes for koalas based on the combination of habitat suitability and biophysical variables, the purpose of which is to strategically focus long-term management and monitoring effort on areas that have the highest likelihood of achieving conservation outcomes for koalas.

Koala rehabilitator — a person who is engaged in the rehabilitation (rescue, care, and release) of sick, injured, or orphaned wildlife and is operating under a valid rehabilitation permit either as an individual or as member of a rehabilitation organisation.

Local government — the twelve local governments that make up the South East Queensland region, as defined in the South East Queensland Regional Plan, which includes, Brisbane City Council, City of Gold Coast Council, Ipswich City Council, Lockyer Valley Regional Council, Logan City Council, Moreton Bay Regional Council, Noosa Shire Council, Redland City Council, Scenic Rim Regional Council, Somerset Regional Council, Sunshine Coast Council, and the urban extent of Toowoomba Regional Council.

On-site confirmation — an in-person visual inspection of the release site, conducted by a koala rehabilitator prior to the release of a koala, to confirm whether the release site is currently suitable for release.

Selection of Release Sites for Rehabilitated Koalas in South East Queensland

Orphaned — a koala that was rescued at a stage of development where it was or would have been dependent on its mother but was kept, fed, and cared for by a person, in place of its mother due to the mother being deceased or temporarily sick or injured.

Permit — a rehabilitation permit issued under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

Protected wildlife — an animal that is prescribed as such in the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

Rehabilitation — a multi-phase process aiming to address the welfare needs of koalas that are found sick, injured, or orphaned, and contribute positively to koala conservation, including rescue, care (if necessary), and release of koalas to the wild, in such a way that they can, where possible, successfully re-join local breeding populations.

Rehabilitation organisation — a corporation or association holding a valid rehabilitation permit whose members engage in the rehabilitation of sick, injured, or orphaned wildlife.

Rescue — limited to koalas that are, or are reasonably suspected to be, sick, injured, or orphaned, as per section 6.2.2. of the Code of Practice.

Rescue site — the location that the koala was rescued.

SEQ Wildlife Hospital — a veterinary clinic of the SEQ Wildlife Hospital Network.

SEQ Wildlife Hospital Network — Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital, Currumbin Wildlife Hospital, Moggill Koala Rehabilitation Centre, and RSPCA Wildlife Hospital.

SEQ or South East Queensland — the twelve local government areas that make up the South East Queensland region, as defined in the South East Queensland Regional Plan, which includes, Brisbane City Council, City of Gold Coast Council, Ipswich City Council, Lockyer Valley Regional Council, Logan City Council, Moreton Bay Regional Council, Noosa Shire Council, Redland City Council, Scenic Rim Regional Council, Somerset Regional Council, Sunshine Coast Council, and the urban extent of Toowoomba Regional Council.

Veterinary surgeon — a person registered as a veterinary surgeon under the *Veterinary Surgeons Act 1936*.

Veterinary treatment — the conduct and application of veterinary surgery and veterinary medicine when applied to sick, injured, or orphaned animals by a veterinary surgeon.

Wildlife — a protected animal as defined in the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

Selection of Release Sites for Rehabilitated Koalas in South East Queensland

Human Rights Act 2019 compatibility

The department is committed to respecting, protecting and promoting human rights. Under the [Human Rights Act 2019](#), the department has an obligation to act and make decisions in a way that is compatible with human rights and, when making a decision, to give proper consideration to human rights. When acting or making a decision under this Guideline, officers must comply with that obligation (refer to [Comply with Human Rights Act](#)).

Disclaimer

While this document has been prepared with care it contains general information and does not profess to offer legal, professional or commercial advice. The Queensland Government accepts no liability for any external decisions or actions taken on the basis of this document. Persons external to the Department of Environment and Science should satisfy themselves independently and by consulting their own professional advisors before embarking on any proposed course of action.

Approved By

Ben Klaassen

Signature

30 June 2023

Date

Deputy Director-General

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and
Partnerships

Enquiries:

Wildlife and Threatened Species -
Governance and Operational Policy Unit
Phone: 13 QGOV (13 74 68)

Email: Wildlife.Management@des.qld.gov.au